

**Sylvia Deporto**  
**Deputy Director**  
**Children's Service Division**  
**Riverside County, Riverside, CA**

The Children's Research Center Data on Safety Assessments for California Counties indicates that approximately 50% of children in Riverside County removed from their parents by Child Welfare Services involve parental substance abuse. In Riverside County, we have four law enforcement drug teams. Each of these teams has at least one social worker assigned to them to assist with drug labs.

Social workers must take children removed from drug labs directly to a hospital for evaluation and testing. The social worker may wait up to six hours in an emergency room with the children. Many of these children have been neglected, demonstrating signs of malnourishment, lack of physical and dental hygiene, physical and/or sexual abuse and test positive for chemicals due to exposure.

Riverside County recently purchased four Community Resource Vehicles specifically for use by Law Enforcement and Child Welfare at drug labs. Due to chemical exposure, children need to be cleaned with water immediately and in the past, this has occurred outside with a hose. The Community Resource Vehicle will provide a place for the child to be cleaned in a shower and provided with clean clothes and food. The social worker will now have a safe place to conduct interviews with the children on site.

Children who are placed in the custody of Child Welfare Services require continued medical follow up and evaluation. Social Workers must ensure that these children are tested regularly for chemical levels and this information must be recorded in their health history.

Many of these children have not attended school on a regular basis and must be provided with special education services to bring them up to grade level. Both foster caregivers and educators struggle with a multitude of behavioral problems and learning disabilities due to pre-natal drug exposure to methamphetamine.

Riverside County has initiated several drug courts in an attempt to address the severity of our drug problem, its effect on multiple agencies and most importantly, its effect on our children.

Riverside County's Drug Endangered Children Program has provided us the opportunity to come together as professionals in an attempt to address this ever growing problem of methamphetamine use and abuse.

I remember a case when I was still a field social worker. The parents were methamphetamine abusers and were hiding from CPS with their children. They were located living in a rural part of Riverside County in a small travel trailer. As we were taking the children, the parents were attempting to flee. The trailer was filthy and the smell was overwhelming. At the office, the children stated to me that they used the bathroom outside "just like the dogs", washed in the hose and it was very cold, and they "dumpster dived" for their dinner.

Children should not know a life like this.

I urge you to take notice of the severity of our nation's problem with substance abuse, and in particular, methamphetamine abuse. There are severe long term consequences for our nation and extreme costs. If you consider what we are currently spending on specialized law enforcement teams, hazardous material teams, child welfare staff, foster care, medical and educational costs to address the needs of the children, the dollars are overwhelming.

I thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you today.